4:Phillips E-4,5 (1956-1957) 1966
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Villagers also recognize the reluctance of an individual to become involved in another person's problems on the grounds of avoiding the accusation of *actually* having caused them. They say (but again, empirical instances of this type are very hard to find) that frequently the person with good intentions is turned on by the very friend he is trying to help, for example, "Since you know so much about the broken windmill perhaps you were the one who broke it!" Both these attitudes result from a rather overinflated view of one's importance to the friend, as if the friend would be more concerned with the agent of information than with the information itself. This is not so much a confusion of means and ends as a re-identification of them. Finally, some of the villagers' reluctance is probably also due to simple indifference or laziness regarding the plight of the friend.

Other expressions of *the "?aaj-ness" complex are more clearly altruistic* than the above. Villagers explain, for example, that the reason there is never any more than one candidate for the post of hamlet or commune headman, on the rare occasions when such elections are held, is to avoid embarrassing the individuals involved. The eventual headman would be embarrassed because the presence of a competitor would suggest doubt about his competence; the candidate who lost would be embarrassed by the very fact that he lost. To avoid hurt feelings, only one candidate is presented, voted on, and elected.

We have been talking above about politeness primarily in a negative sense, that is, about the lengths to which villagers will go to *avoid* discomforting others or upsetting peaceful relationships. This aspect was stressed because its expressions represent a somewhat unique form of patterned social interaction. However, the many positive forms of the villagers' politeness to friends and kin should not be minimized: their concern with choosing topics of conversation they think will interest or entertain others; their search for opportunities to flatter them, sometimes in pseudo-mocking fashion, but more often to make them feel good; their attention to providing others with a pleasing audience—being silent, attentive, and eager when others are declaiming on a favorite subject. Of course, many times the villagers are not listening, but they try to behave as if they were. The aim here is to make others feel that what they are saying is worthwhile. An important part of this is that one almost never directly challenges the veracity or logic of the speaker's statements. If disbelief is the only appropriate response, it should be done silently. Nothing except personal pain and interpersonal tension would be gained from a direct challenge. If one feels strongly enough about the issue, which is very rare,[16] the presentation of an *alternative* view would not be inappropriate. But one

[16] The rarity of strong feelings is due to the fact that so often the very purpose of such conversations is to convey politeness and nothing more. The actual topic of conversation is simply a medium of contact, not a matter to be seriously discussed.

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Analysis: The SCT's Exploration of Thai Personality[1]

Attitudes Toward Authority

The first area to be dealt with is in a sense the easiest. Thai attitudes toward authority represent what is perhaps the most explicitly expressed and highly ramified area of their social psychological life. The notion of authority—a sense of superordination and subordination—is an intrinsic part of their linguistic structure, it being impossible to address or refer to a person without indicating his social status relative to the self; two-week-old infants are taught to *waj*, or offer the gesture of obeisance to superiors; during elections, villagers say that they are going to vote for the prime minister because "he is our Master. He has been very good and kind to us. He is like our father, and we are like his children"; the entire structure of the family is predicated on a system of superordination and subordination, even to the extent of considering a twin born a few minutes ahead of his sibling the latter's social superior. Examples expressive of this emphasis in the workaday life of the villagers could be cited endlessly.

What is impressive in the data to follow is not only the near unanimity of villagers in responding positively to what are essentially neutral authority situations, but the tendency on the part of a large number to respond positively to the authority situation even when the authority figure is avowedly wrong. Many of their responses also make quite explicit the underlying ethical justifications for the authority system.

The first item, *"When the phuujinjaj told him to do it, he . . . ,"* is a

[1] Words and phrases appearing in parentheses in the responses on the following pages are for purposes of clarification. The few Thai words appearing in the responses are either "complex concepts" or "difficult to translate" terms, and have been retained mainly for those readers familiar with Thai. At the top of the table, the English language item that was originally prepared for the villagers appears first; it is followed by the best English translation of the actual Thai item given to informants, including the Thai pronouns that were used. Intra-sample differences (age, sex, religion, economic position), where important, are indicated in the text, not the tables.